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Fisher

Martes pennanti

Range:

Occurs exclusively in North America. Currently found in Canada below 60° N latitude from Hudson's Bay to James Bay (Powell 1982). In the United States, fishers occur in portions of the Appalachian Mountains from New England south to West Virginia, northern Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan, northern Idaho, western Montana, and as far south as northern California along the West Coast (Allen 1983).

Washington Distribution:

Historic records indicate the fisher was concentrated primarily in remote portions of the Olympic Mountains, with additional distributions along the Cascades and far east as the Okanogan Valley (Scheffer 1938). The species is apparently absent from the southern and eastern portions of the state (Yocom and McCollum 1973), but presumably still occurs on the Olympic Peninsula (Houston and Seaman 1985), and in other parts of its historic range.

Habitat Requirements:

Fishers inhabit dense coniferous and mixed coniferous/deciduous forests with extensive, continuous canopy (Buck 1983, Allen 1983). Mature to old-growth stands are generally preferred due to the increased availability of cover and den sites that these stands afford (deVos 1951, Ingram 1973). However, second-growth forests with good cover may also be used. Habitat that offers cover to fishers and their prey is critical in winter. Mixed conifer/hardwood stands where 50 to 90% of the overstory is composed of evergreen trees are assumed to provide optimum winter habitat (Allen 1983).

Riparian areas, ridgelines, and lake shores, located in and adjacent to forests, are used by fishers for foraging and as movement corridors (Buck et al. 1983, Allen 1983, deVos 1951). Fishers apparently do not limit their home ranges to a single major ridge or drainage, but may use more than one ridge as well as major and minor drainages (Buck et al. 1979). This species will not travel far into large openings (Ingram 1973) and clearcut areas are avoided, especially in winter (deVos 1951, Irvine et al. 1964, Powell 1982).

Fishers feed on a variety of small to medium-sized mammals and birds, and carrion. Ingram (1973) found that northern flying squirrels, snowshoe hares, and Douglas squirrels were important food items in Oregon.

Young fishers are reared in maternity dens, which are located high in large

hollow snags or logs (Buck et al. 1979). Adults also use a variety of temporary shelters and sleeping sites including hollow logs, tree cavities, brush piles, snow dens, and burrows of other animals (Allen 1983).

Home range size estimates for fishers have ranged from 158 ha to 3,887 ha (0.61 to 15 sq. mi.)(Buck et al. 1979, Allen 1983). Allen (1983) estimated that at least 259km² (100 mi.²) of suitable contiguous habitat was necessary for an area to be successfully inhabited by a population of fishers.

Limiting Factors:

The fisher has been eliminated from much of its original range because of extensive timber harvest and overtrapping (Powell 1982).

Management Recommendations:

Large tracts, at least 259 km² (100 mi.²) of mature, uneven-aged forest stands with at least 80% canopy closure should be maintained where fishers are present. Ideally created openings should be no longer than 91m (100 yd.) and should follow contours of the land (Ingram 1973).

Where logging must occur, clearcut areas should be kept small or narrow and interspersed with uncut areas. Management using small clearcuts on long rotations that maintains most of the forest in mature age classes would provide fisher habitat (Allen 1983). Clearcuts should be revegetated as soon as possible, using the same species composition that harvesting removed.

Maintain forested cover on ridgelines and in drainage bottoms that are or could be used by fishers. Retain and encourage as much ground cover as possible in cutover areas to provide adequate cover for the fisher's prey. Maintain snags, downed woody material, and hollow trees to provide potential den sites for fishers (Ingram 1973, Allen 1983).

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Key Points:

Habitat Requirements:

- Inhabit dense coniferous and mixed coniferous/deciduous forests with continuous canopy cover; avoid clearcuts and other large openings.
- Utilize riparian areas, ridgelines, and lake shores for movement and foraging.
- May use more than one drainage.
- Feed on mammals and birds.
- Require large snags or hollow logs for rearing young.

Management Recommendations:

- Maintain large tracts of mature, uneven-aged forest (at least 259 km², 100mi.²) of stands with at least 80% canopy closure.
- Openings should be no longer than 91m (100 yd.) and should follow land contours.
- Intersperse clearcut areas among uncut areas; keep clearcuts as small as possible and revegetate as soon as possible.
- Maintain forested cover on ridgelines and in drainage bottoms.
- Retain snags, "defective" trees, and logs in harvest areas.